

Flashback Interview: Jamie Redford, Filmmaker of ‘Resilience’ and Son of Robert, Dies at Age 58

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MARIN COUNTY, CALIF. – James “Jamie” Redford was on a righteous mission. The activist filmmaker created documentaries that spoke of the ills society is facing, including “Toxic Hot Seat” (chemicals in households), “Paper Tigers” (childhood psychology), “Resilience” (a deeper dive into Adverse Childhood Experience) and his recent “Happening: A Clean Energy Revolution.” Jamie Redford died of bile duct cancer on October 16th, 2020, at his home in Marin County, California. He was 58.

David James Redford was born in New York City, the same month his father Robert appeared in his first film (“War Hunt,” 1962). Throughout his life he fought health issues, and was diagnosed with sclerosis cholangitis while in college, which led later to two liver transplants in the early 1990s. As a result, his father founded the James Redford Institute for Transplant Awareness. Also along with his father, Jamie co-founded The Redford Center, which uses impact-driven film and media to accelerate environmental and climate justice. Jamie is survived by his wife Kyle and two children, as well as Robert Redford and his mother Lola Van Wagenen.



Filmmaker and Activist Jamie Redford

Photo credit: The Redford Center

In 2016, Jamie Redford spoke with Patrick McDonald of HollywoodChicago.com, on his film "Resilience."

HollywoodChicago.com: You seem to be on a mission with this film, providing common sense information to a society that seems to think there are no solutions. What is different about the solutions you portray in the film then other social programs?

Jamie Redford: When you have really solid biology and medical science at the core of an issue, it makes it much easier to identify what potential solutions may be. It's also important to say that myself or [Producer] Karen Pritzker that this film is going to solve crime, poverty or singlehandedly make big changes.

What it can do, and what my previous film 'Paper Tigers' [exploring the same topic] have proven, is that it can point toward helpful tools for change. And when you introduce these tools into the community, they can be adopted and implemented at the local level – and the results have been powerful. We have to ask the questions, how do people survive in poverty and other challenges of traumatic childhoods. Until we fix this underlying problems, how do we help people in the meantime?

HollywoodChicago.com: The title of the film, Resilience, refers to the survival instincts that a person develops to deal with trauma. What has been the simplest technique that you observed in working on the film, and how is it best applied?

Redford: The word 'resilience,' in our American culture is closely aligned with 'grit,' and that word implies a certain moral fiber that says you can survive and thrive in any adversity, because you are strong. But that message is usually both disqualifying and problematic.

Resilience is not just a complimentary individual quality, but something that is built. And you build it through a number of things in your life, part of it being social fabric. There needs to be the support and help around you, even when you may have an unhealthy home environment. Many people have overcome that situation simply by having at least one caring adult, whether a teacher, mentor or religious leader.

HollywoodChicago.com: How is that expressed in your film?

Redford: Our aim in the film is to make people understand that resilience is something you can create, build or develop, rather than just having a gift organically or thinking you are a special person or not. That's really important.

HollywoodChicago.com: One of the components that expresses itself in the film is the African American experience in this country, in association with Adverse Childhood Trauma. What solutions can be applied in that circumstance, especially in association with generations in the culture of poverty?

Redford: I think everyone understands when these cycles are disrupted, especially in terms of institutionalized poverty, it's really a difficult situation. Patterns are put into place, and certain behaviors keep getting repeated. But through what I have witnessed and documented, with proper interventions you can break those cycles. When I made the first film on this subject, Paper Tigers, kids were going off the cliff. But there was intervention, and they won't go off the cliff.

It doesn't take billions of dollars or complex medical technologies, and there doesn't have to be an upending to the current order. It's trying to change the mindset of people who deal with youth to have less judgement and more curiosity. That's asking a lot, emotionally it's asking people to step up and engage more. But what I often heard was that is easier for them to engage than to be angry and judgmental.

HollywoodChicago.com: Meditation in schools is a technique that is mentioned in your film, much like director David Lynch has done with Transcendental Meditation (TM) in a Detroit school. How is that a progressive method in stemming adverse childhood trauma?

Redford: There is a wonderful documentary called 'A Room to Breathe,' where a school brought in a TM instructor, to try and establish a better classroom environment, and the results and transformations were profound. It's impossible to ignore, and we make some passing references in my film, but 'A Room to Breathe' is a closer look at just how powerful meditation can be. I'm in full support of that and what David Lynch is doing, it's very important.

HollywoodChicago.com: Did you yourself take the Adverse Childhood Experience test that is described in the film, and what did those results tell you?

Redford: The interesting thing about the ACE study, as it began in the 1990s, is that it was based on a very strict set of ten questions. But what is evolving from that is a better understanding what kind of experiences are beyond the ten questions, and what kind of stressors it generates, there are so many ways that children can be exposed to ongoing stress.

And while my personal ACE score might be quite low, compared to other persons doing that questionnaire, I look back and see all kinds of things that probably had a negative effect on me, and I have a strong awareness of that. Therefore, in middle age I've begun to embrace stress reducing behaviors. Just in doing yoga, for example, my health has improved dramatically.

HollywoodChicago.com: You are mostly a documentary maker, but you did do one narrative film in 2003. What do you observe about the film business that makes it difficult to maneuver, and has your name been more helpful than hindering in your career?

Redford: There can be no argument that I'm in a unique situation, at the very least. But I think the name, for every time it has proved to be helpful, it has also proved to be a challenge – I tend to think it cancels each other out. At the end of the day, the task I have is just like anyone else, to prove myself through my product or work. I've really found this to be true, that it's a zero sum gain.

HollywoodChicago.com: Would you like to try a narrative film again?

Redford: I would never say never, but it would take the right kind of opportunity, script and team. In documentary films, being able to be a storytelling and embrace film as an art form – while being very clearly connected in trying to help make the world a better place – is really important to me. It’s hard to do this kind of work, as I have for the past eight years, and imagine myself going back to the world of entertainment. But I can never presume that there would never be another narrative opportunity, especially if I came across something that knocked me out of my chair.

HollywoodChicago.com: Your grandfather, Charles Redford, lived to a ripe old age. What can you say about him that people would be surprised about, given your father’s image?

Redford: My grandfather was a prominent executive at Chevron [oil], and of course my father is a fairly radical and progressive environmentalist. But he was also a very active Democrat and pacifist. More importantly, he was one of the best storytellers I’ve ever met. I think that trait has been passed down the line, even to my kids.

HollywoodChicago.com: Your father was born one year before my father, and you were born two years after me. What do you observe as different about men in their generation than ours?

Redford: I think the macho mystique was far more a guiding principle in our Dad’s generation than ours, the ‘strong silent type’ was much more common. But I also think there is a wisdom and strength in that generation, in terms of getting through difficult times, and there is a stoicism in the face of challenges that I greatly admire. There is also a philosophy of less-is-more, and a little dignity never hurt anybody. There are many qualities to admire about our father’s generation.

Source material for this article is from the Salt Lake City Tribune. Jamie Redford, 1962-2020. For more information about The Redford Center, [click here](#). [25]



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